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A
Brief Description
of
LITTLE BADDOW
PARISH CHURCH

PRICE THREEPENCE

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A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF
THE PARISH CHURCH
OF SAINT MARY THE VIRGIN
LITTLE BADDOW

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THE original Norman church was built at the close of the eleventh century, but of this the only remaining part is the north wall of the Nave, though the quoins of Roman tiles at the angles of this wall have led some authorities to assign a pre-Norman date to this part of the building. The round-arched doorway, built of Roman tiles (formerly known as 'The Devil's Door'), may be seen outside, blocked with eighteenth-century brickwork, and a fragment of a Norman capital, found in the village, is now placed in the south-west window of the Nave. Toward the middle of the fourteenth century, the Norman structure, with the exception of this wall, was taken down and a Chancel, Nave with Lady Chapel on the south side, and Tower in the Decorated Style, substituted. In the south wall of the Tower, a break in the string-course suggests an interruption in the process of the work, possibly caused by the Black Death.

About 1400 the Tower was adapted for the bells, and probably the south porch was added. A little later, the need for more light and more elaborate services led to the erection of a window in the Perpendicular Style over the High Altar, and the making of a 'Priest's Door' on the south side of the Chancel for processions, and also to the construction of a

Rood-loft and Screen. The marks of the doorways, now filled up, leading to the stairs, can be traced in the north wall near the pulpit, and the mortices, cut to receive the arms of the Rood, remain in the Chancel-Arch. The Gallery, obscuring the beautiful Decorated Arch between Tower and Nave, and the Vestry, were added in the eighteenth century.

The window in the north wall is of the Decorated period, as are also the south windows in the Chancel and the window over the Altar in the Lady Chapel. The two windows in the south wall of the Nave have been reconstructed in later times. The 'low side-window' in the Chancel, a so-called 'Leper-window,' was probably used for the ringing of a hand-bell during the Mass.

The great mural painting opposite the south door, representing Saint Christopher, was discovered beneath the plaster in 1923, and probably dates from 1370. The fourteenth-century corbels supporting the tie-beams of the Roof show traces of their former natural colouring, and the decoration of the wall as preserved under the Christopher, indicates that in the twelfth century the whole of the interior of the building was covered with a 'masonry' pattern of purple lines, and that later a bright red background to a design of stars at frequent intervals was superimposed. Traces of colour may be seen at the south door.

In the Lady Chapel are two elaborate tombs, dating from about 1340. The carved wooden effigies are those of a man and a woman in civilian garments of the period, and are of exceptional interest, there being only three monuments of this character of laymen in England and Wales. The tradition says that Sir Hugh de Badew and his two

wives lie beneath, but the monuments may be those of Sir John Filol and his wife, who owned the Hall at this time, with whose family the de Badews intermarried. In point of fact, five skeletons were found beneath during excavations in the eighteenth century.

On the north side of the Chancel is a conspicuous monument to Sir Henry Mildmay of Graces, who died in 1639, and beneath are figures representing his first wife, Alice, on the left, and second wife, who survived him, on the right. The work is possibly by the hand of Nicholas Stone.

There are brasses in the church: (1) in the floor of the Nave to William Toft (1470); (2) on the east wall of the Nave beneath the War Memorial, to Mercymight Bristowe (1611). There are other Tablets of more recent date.

Over the east window in the Chancel are two stained-glass windows (about 1400); on the left hand, Saint Michael striking at the dragon; and on the right hand, possibly Saint George, but this latter window is much injured. Other fragments of stained glass are to be found in the east window of the Lady Chapel, probably fourteenth century.

Of the Bells, the oldest is the Tenor, inscribed 'Sancta Maria Ora Pro Nobis,' dating from the end of the fourteenth century, and one of the oldest in the county. Another Bell, by Henry Jordan, now cracked and preserved on the ground floor of the Tower, dates from about 1450, and is inscribed, 'Sancte Toma Ora Pro Nobis.' Two other Bells, dated respectively 1636 (recast) and about 1600, are by Miles Graye and John Dier, and a treble bell has been added in 1925. The massive timber Bell-

frame, now carefully repaired, dates probably from the end of the fourteenth century.

In the Tower is a Chest dating, it is conjectured, from the latter half of the fifteenth century, and a fourteenth-century oak door leading to the stairway. Another chest, of the seventeenth century, stands in the Vestry.

The Jacobean oak panelling around the Nave was made from the old pews.

A Stoup, formerly used for Holy Water, is let into the wall by the south door.

A Niche for a statuette, now empty, is on the north side of the west door.

Some carved stone fragments of twelfth-century work have been built into the more recent masonry of the Chancel.

The Lantern now hanging in the Porch was traditionally used for burials at night in times of pestilence.

The Processional Cross with its careful symbolism, and the List of Rectors, are recent additions, and are the work of a parishioner.

By the same hand is the beautiful Font-cover by the wall, surmounting the oak tablet bearing Scripture texts relating to the doctrine of Baptism, and flanked by the pewter candlesticks that have been specially designed, and are the gift of a parishioner. The Dove wrought in mother-of-pearl, and signifying the Holy Spirit with the seven rays emblematic of the Seven Gifts, is breaking through the clouds and revealing the blue heaven above the waters. The sconces are decorated with St. John's Wort, with its blood-spotted roots.

The very primitive Norman Font outside the Church by the west door, was found in a garden in Boreham parish, about a mile away. The present Font in Little Baddow Church was placed there in 1858, and there is no record to show how the previous one was disposed of. It is uncertain therefore, whether this Norman Font came originally from Boreham (where there is an Early English Font) or from our parish Church. Probability, however, is on the side of the latter, as, if the Early English Font replaced it in Boreham, it would have had to have survived six hundred years of neglect.

The building is a monument to over eight hundred years of continuous faith and worship. Let us give thanks for those who have left us our wonderful heritage. Let us pray God that His Will may be fulfilled in the hearts and lives of all that minister and worship here. Let us praise Him for His gifts expressed in art, in architecture, in literature and in music, and give ourselves to the task of building the spiritual Temple of the Kingdom in Truth, Goodness, and Beauty by drawing near to our Father in heaven through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

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